

Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Gates of the Arctic NP&P
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Fairbanks, AK 99709-3420

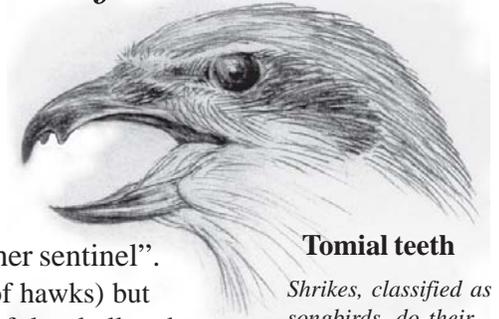


Northern Shrike, Rapacious Songbird of the Arctic

by Mark D. Ross, 2006 Artist in Residence

The ornithological term “raptor” refers to diurnal birds of prey such as hawks, eagles and kin: those with strong feet tipped with needle sharp spike-like talons. The shrike, though rapacious in nature, is classified as a songbird. It’s feet are more suited for perching than predation.

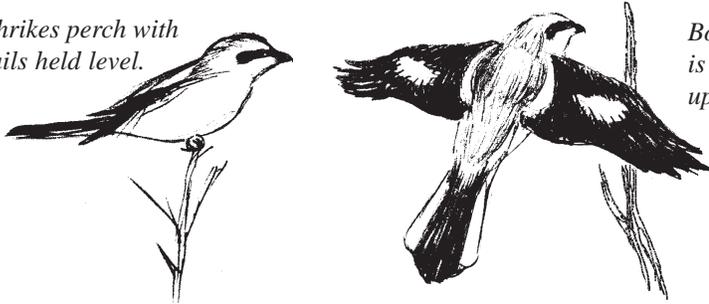
The **Northern Shrike**’s scientific name, *Lanius exubitor* translates to “butcher sentinel”. Lethal blows are delivered, not with taloned feet (it’s feet are not strong like those of hawks) but with a “toothed” similar beak. Prey is subdued by hacking and ripping at the base of the skull and neck. Then flying off to a perch the shrike drapes the food in a forked branch of a tree or shrub. In more southern climates the butcher impales the meat on thorny projections.



Tomial teeth

Shrikes, classified as songbirds, do their deadly business with beaks rather than feet.

Shrikes perch with tails held level.

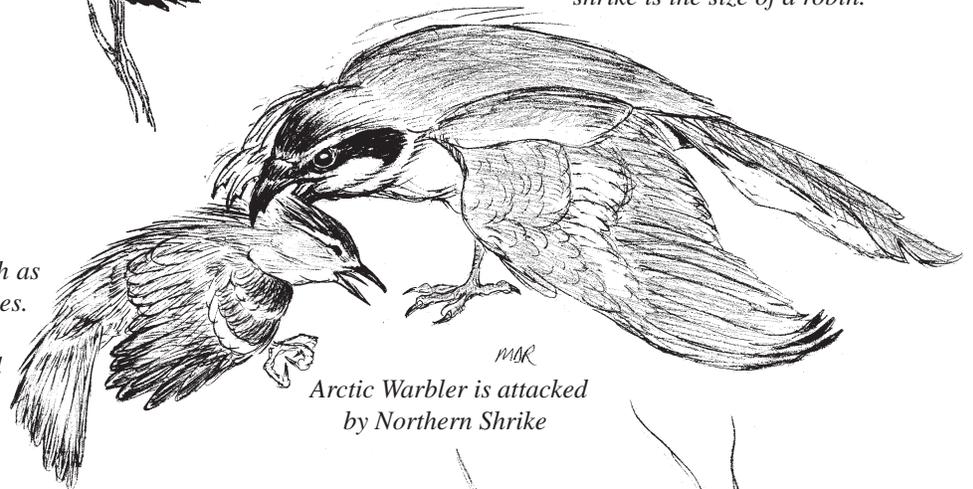


Bold black and white plumage is conspicuous when swooping up to perch.

10 inches in length, the northern shrike is the size of a robin.

Prey of the “Butcher”

Birds and small mammals such as voles are favorite prey of shrikes. Prey is often dispatched with wounds to the base of the skull and upper neck area.



Arctic Warbler is attacked by Northern Shrike

Small songbirds like this **redpoll** are often the prey. But alert prey may become the aggressor and attempt to drive away a shrike.



Often, the calls of scolding songbirds are the clue to the presence of a shrike.



The “Butcher’s” larder a small mammal or bird hanging in a tree is a sign that the “butcher” is about.